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Newton's Intellectual Joy

Or

A New Look at Brentano on Intellectual and Sensory Pleasure

7811 words

1. Introduction

How should one understand value or 'goodness'? One influential answer to this question makes use of the notion of pleasure. Something is good if, and only if it is correct to take pleasure in it. The pleasure we take is itself valuable: it is correct to like it. It is therefore desirable to have an account of pleasure that can inform one's value theory.

Brentano's writings contain suggestive remarks about the intentionality and metaphysics of pleasure that point to such an account. He distinguished between two fundamental kinds of pleasure: intellectual (*geistiger*) and sensory (*sinnlicher*) pleasure (*Lust*). In this paper I will approach Brentano's conception of pleasure via this distinction. I want to answer the following questions: What do sensory and intellectual pleasures have in common, what distinguishes them? Can the distinction be justified? How are sensory and intellectual pleasure related to each other?

Brentano's work on pleasure is grounded in his reading of book X of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle investigates the nature of pleasure.¹ Aristotle took pleasure in thinking, intellectual activities broadly conceived, to be different in kind from pleasure in perceptual activities, watching, listening etc. (Brentano's '*sinnliche Lust*' is an echo of the second idea: it is pleasure in the activities of the *senses* (*Sinne*).) I will therefore start with an outline of Aristotelian key-ideas about pleasure and then move on to Brentano's development of them. For Aristotle and Brentano, pleasure is a *non-propositional* attitude towards an activity. If one has this attitude to an activity at a time, one either performs or undergoes the activity at that time.

The Brentanian view of sensory and intellectual pleasure that will emerge from section 2 to 4 is fundamentally different from the one Brentano's most influential exegete Roderick Chisholm presented in his book *Brentano on Intrinsic*

¹ See PES, 113-4 [I, 207-8]

Value and other works. According to Chisholm, one takes intellectual pleasure if one is pleased that *p* and this propositional attitude causes one to experience sensory pleasure. I will argue that Chisholm's Brentano holds an implausible view. Fortunately Chisholm's Brentano is not Brentano. While Chisholm took sensory pleasure to be basic in an account of nonsensory pleasure, Feldman turned the direction of explanation around: we need to appeal to nonsensory pleasure to say what sensory pleasures are. I will argue that Feldman's view suffers from similar problems as Chisholm's. The paper ends with an irenic note: neither Chisholm's propositional nor Brentano's non-propositional approach captures all nonsensory pleasures. Both approaches are needed.

2. An Outline of Brentano's Aristotelian Background

Philosophers often focus on sensations and feelings when discussing pleasure. They start by giving examples of (un)pleasant sensations – the sensation one has when being massaged, the sensation of drinking a good wine etc. – and go on to ask what their pleasantness consist in.²

This approach to pleasure is foreign to Aristotle and the philosophers who follow him. Although anachronistic, it is helpful to start with a quote from Ryle's *Concept of Mind* to home in on the notion of pleasure that Aristotle took to be important:

‘Pleasure’ [...] is used sometimes to denote special kinds of moods, such as elation, joy and amusement. [...] But there is another sense in which we say that a person who is so absorbed in some activity, such as golf or argument, that he is reluctant to stop, or even to think of anything else, is ‘taking pleasure in’ or ‘enjoying’ doing what he is doing, though he is in no degree convulsed or beside himself, and though he is not, therefore, experiencing any particular feelings. (Ryle 1949, 104)

Aristotelians are not investigating sensations that have a certain ‘feel’. The topic of book X of the *Nichomachean Ethics* is what it is to enjoy an activity such as *playing the flute, thinking about geometrical problems, building a house or eating a good*

² A good example is Rachels 2000, 187.

meal.³ The pleasure we take in an activity completes and intensifies it. The sense of completion under consideration is difficult to capture. Pleasure completes an activity as the nice blend of tastes completes the taste of wine.⁴ The enjoyment of an activity is not a distinct activity, but depends on the activity one takes pleasure in. In the next section we will see that Brentano expands on this point. The sense of intensification is more straightforward: If I enjoy bird watching, I will devote my attention to the movements of the bird and my watching will be better (more accurate, yield more information) than the watching of person who is no ‘lover of bird watching’.

Pleasure or enjoyment is present directed. One can only take pleasure in flute playing if one is playing the flute. There is also a dispositional sense of ‘taking pleasure’ in which one can be said to take pleasure in flute playing if one is disposed to enjoy flute playing. But this sense of enjoyment is not under consideration here.

On one reading of Aristotle, there are two basic kinds of enjoyment: enjoyment of perceptual activities (perceiving) and enjoyment of intellectual activities (thinking). Perceptual activities are exercises of our senses; intellectual activities are exercises of the capacity to reason and contemplate. Bostock explains the fundamentality of these two kinds of enjoyment nicely:

[T]he builder may enjoy seeing his wall go up so straightly and so cleanly, as he may also enjoy the feel of the trowel in his hand, and the bodily sensations produced by the effortless exercise of his muscles. He may also enjoy first anticipating and then contemplating the completed building. In these thoughts and perceptions there may be pleasure, but not in the actual process of building. And Aristotle’s fundamental thought here is that pleasure takes place in the mind, but one can hardly say this of building, any more than of eating and drinking. (Bostock 1988, 271)⁵

The builder enjoys building because he enjoys certain activities of thought – planning, drawing, anticipating – and perceptual activities – seeing the wall go straight up,

³ On the centrality of activity in Aristotle’s thought about pleasure see, for example, Urmson 1967, 324 and Bostock 1988.

⁴ This characterization is proposed with different examples by Shields 2011, 209.

⁵ Bostock 2000, 160 takes it to be difficult to make a case for it.

feeling the trowel – that are involved in building, that is, either building consists in these activities or there is a regular connection between building and these activities.

Aristotle argued that enjoyment of intellectual activities is different in kind from enjoyment of perceptual activities:

For things different in kind are, we think, completed by different things (we see this to be true both of natural objects and of things produced by art, e.g. animals, trees, a painting, a sculpture, a house, an implement); and, similarly, we think that activities differing in kind are completed by things differing in kind. Now the activities of thought differ from those of the senses, and among themselves, in kind; so, therefore, do the pleasures that complete them. (NE 1175^a1 23-28; transl. by Ross (revised by Urmson))

Intellectual activities differ in kind from perceptual activities. What does this difference consist in? The fundamental difference between thought or reason and perception concerns their intentionality. Thought can ‘become’ (represent) things of all kinds (see *De Anima* 3.5). It has no dedicated kind of object and lacks an organ to respond to objects of a particular kind. It is ‘unconstrained with respect to its objects’ (Shields 2015, 302). In contrast, perception is constrained with respect to its objects. There are different senses each of which responds to some kind of objects but not to others. Sight is of colours; hearing is of sounds etc.

If activities of different kinds are completed by pleasures, the completing pleasures are also different in kind. Hence, the pleasure that completes activities of thought is of different kind than the pleasure that completes perceptual activities. There are two fundamental kinds of pleasure: intellectual and sensory pleasure. Aristotle suggests further that also the exercises of different senses differ in kind. The pleasure one takes in bird watching is of different kind from the pleasure in hearing.

Aristotle distinguished also between bodily pleasures and pleasures of the soul (NE III.10). Bodily pleasure is not a new kind of pleasure; it is a subspecies of sensory pleasure: bodily pleasure is pleasure in perceiving states of or changes in one’s body. Pleasures of the soul are, it seems plausible to say, pleasures of thinking under a different name. They are pleasures one takes in the activities distinctive of the soul, namely thinking and contemplating.

Aristotle's thesis that sensory and intellectual pleasures are different in kind raises several questions: Why does a difference in the kind of activity make for a difference in kind of the completing activity? What is a difference in kind in the first place? It would be good if we could make the core distinction plausible without answering these difficult questions.

In section 4 and 5 I will try to do so by drawing on Brentano's work. But let us first see how Brentano built on Aristotle.

3. Brentano's Aristotelian View of Enjoyment

Brentano's view of pleasure elaborates some of the suggestions made by Aristotle. Consider the following quote:

[1.] One thing certainly has to be admitted; the object to which a feeling refers [*bezieht*] is not always an external object. [2.] Even in cases where I hear a harmonious sound the pleasure I feel is not actually pleasure in the sound [*nicht eigentlich eine Lust an dem Tone*], but pleasure in the hearing. [3.] In fact one could say not without justification that in a certain sense it [the pleasure] refers to itself, and that therefore what Hamilton said becomes the case, namely that the feeling and the object are "fused into one". (PES, 69 [I, 127]; my emphasis.)

In 1. Brentano goes beyond Aristotle in applying the notion of intentionality to enjoyment: my enjoyment *refers* to something. Brentano's first stab characterisation of intentionality is that

[e]very mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. (PES, 68 [I, 124-5].)

The application to enjoyment is straightforward: In enjoyment something is enjoyed; one cannot enjoy without enjoying something.

In 2. Brentano falls in line with Aristotle's view that we always enjoy perceptual or intellectual activities: we enjoy the hearing. But is this consistent with

1.? If the enjoyment does not always refer to an external object, it will at least sometimes refer to an external object. But Aristotle seems to deny that we enjoy external objects.

The impression that 1. is inconsistent with 2. disappears if we take into account that Brentano qualifies in which way we enjoy an external object or process, for instance, the sound that I hear. Yes, we say that we enjoy an external object, but this is *a derived or improper* way of speaking.⁶ *Properly speaking* only sensory or intellectual activities can be enjoyed.⁷ In which sense is saying that we enjoy hearing the music *proper*?

Aristotle took many words that we use in articulating philosophical views to be polysemous; they have several related meanings (He spoke of ‘homonymy’).⁸ Paradigm examples are ‘is’ and ‘true’. Brentano’s first book is a study in the polysemy of ‘to be’: *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*. A good model for the polysemy Brentano has in mind are the interrelated meanings of ‘healthy’. We say that (i) people are healthy, (ii) that someone’s complexion is healthy, (iii) that drinking milk is healthy, (iv) that milk is healthy and so on. The meaning of ‘healthy’ differs in (i) to (iv), but in order to explain or at least gloss the sense of ‘healthy’ in (ii) to (iv) we need to appeal to the sense it has in (i), but we don’t need to appeal to any of the other senses to explain the core-sense. A complexion, for example, is healthy, roughly speaking, if it looks like a complexion that is a natural sign of health in a person. Here the sense of ‘healthy’ in which the word applies to people is proper: activities and food products are said to be healthy with respect to people. Similarly, only intellectual and perceptual activities are enjoyed in the proper or primary sense. A melody is enjoyable because hearing it is enjoyable and not the other way round.⁹ Hence, saying that one enjoys only the hearing of the melody in the proper sense is compatible with saying that one enjoys the melody in a derived sense.

⁶ The English translation does not make this explicit by translating the adjective ‘eigentlich’ as the adverb ‘actually’. The German ‘eigentlich’ can mean ‘inauthentic’ or ‘improper’.

⁷ See also Massin 2013, 331 and Mulligan 2004, 84.

⁸ See Shields 2002 for a systematic study of homonymy in Aristotle.

⁹ I develop and defend Brentano’s view of the proper objects of enjoyment further in Textor 2017, chapter 9.

In 3. Brentano moves again beyond Aristotle by arguing that enjoyment is self-directed. If one enjoys listening to flute music, one enjoys one's enjoying listening to flute music and so on *ad infinitum*. Nonetheless, there is no infinite regress, argues Brentano. For one's enjoyment of an activity is also directed on itself. One enjoys several activities, among them, the activity of enjoying.¹⁰

4. Introducing Sensory and Intellectual Pleasure

Aristotle described people who enjoy an activity as lovers of it.¹¹ 'The lover of the flute' cannot focus on anything else when Jethro Tull is playing 'Living in the Past'. Brentano builds on this and argues that enjoyment is nothing but liking an activity. If one is enjoying listening to flute music, one hears flute music and is loving or, to use a less loaded term, liking it:

Sensory pleasure is an enjoyment [*Wohlgefallen*], sensory pain a disliking [*Missfallen*], that is directed on an act of sensing [*Empfindungsakt*] to which *they themselves belong*. (US, 177; my translation and emphasis.)

One takes sensory pleasure at a time if, and only if, one likes at that time an activity of a sense (watching, listening, sniffing etc.) and one's liking 'belongs' to the activity liked. One takes intellectual pleasure at a time, it seems plausible to continue, if, and only if, one likes at that time an activity of the intellect (proving theorems, thinking about puzzles etc.) and one's liking 'belongs' to the activity liked.

In the remainder of the paper I will develop and defend *a part* of these characterisations of sensory and intellectual pleasure. I will not discuss in detail the role of the clause 'to which they themselves belong'. But it is worth having a brief look at it. When the lover of geometry enjoys proving theorems, the activity of proving is not merely the causal source of pleasurable sensations.¹² One cannot enjoy proving at a time (in a non-dispositional sense) if one is not proving something then.

¹⁰ See Caston (2002, 795-5) who points out one that one need not *notice* one's enjoyment of one's enjoyment, and that one can have further attitudes to one's enjoyment: one can be repulsed by one's enjoyment, desire not to have it, etc.

¹¹ See NE 1175^b 2-7.

¹² Shields 2011, 194-5 sets this view up in order to refute it later.

However, if proving were merely the cause (a cause) of pleasurable sensations, one could – per impossibile – take pleasure in proving without proving, namely if the pleasurable sensation were brought about by a different cause. The liking and the activity liked are not two ‘distinct existences’. Sensory enjoyment is one activity that is directed on several objects – itself and a physical object – all of which it apprehends in different modes: it acknowledges as well as likes these objects. ‘Enjoying listening to Jethro Tull’ is a partial description of the activity that can also be described as ‘listening to Jethro Tull’. Once one describes it partially with respect to the physical object presented, once with respect to the activity liked. We will need to keep this in mind in the further discussion.¹³

Let us now look in more detail at shared features of sensory and intellectual pleasure. According to Brentano’s initial characterization of sensory and intellectual pleasure, both are likings of ongoing activities of which they are part. If they are part of the activity in the sense explained above, one can only enjoy (take pleasure in) an activity or process that is ongoing when one enjoys it. Aristotle (NE 1175^b1 30-35) spoke therefore of activity and enjoyment being close in nature and time. One cannot enjoy one’s future (or past) tasting a host mustard sandwich.

A further intriguing commonality of sensory and intellectual pleasures is that both can be blind or evident. Consider the following quote:

Sensory pleasure is an act of sensing directed on a certain *sensory, localized quality* and which possesses in our secondary consciousness not only the character of presenting and acknowledgement [*Anerkennens*], but also of intense love. To be sure, this loving is in itself purely instinctive and blind, yet it belongs to the class of objects which motivate [*motivieren*] a correctly characterised [*richtig charakterisiert*] love when they are presented in general [*im allgemeinen vorstellen*]. (FCA, 118 [186], my emphasis. I have changed the translation.)

This quote brings out why one needs to take into account that enjoying hearing the flute and hearing the flute are the same activity under different descriptions. For Brentano talks sometimes as if sensory pleasure is directed on physical qualities,

¹³ I have tried to do so in chapter 11 of Textor 2017.

sometimes on perceptual activities. Both are correct *partial* descriptions: the sensory enjoyment is directed on both the physical quality and the perceptual activity to which the enjoyment belongs. As mentioned before, we must take into account that physical objects and activities can both be enjoyed, but the former only in a derived or improper sense. The quality is enjoyed in a derived; the perceptual activity in the primary sense.

What are *blind*, what are *evident* sensory pleasures? In general, the distinction between blind and evident activities cannot be explained in more fundamental terms. It needs to be acquired by considering examples. Brentano encouraged his reader to compare the enjoyment of smoking a good cigar with the pleasure one takes in listening to a Beethoven symphony. The pleasure one takes in smoking a good cigar is a blind sensory pleasure, the pleasure one takes in listening to a Beethoven symphony is an evident one. The distinction between blind and evident enjoyment applies to sensory as well as to intellectual enjoyment.¹⁴ The enjoyment of inquiring is an evident intellectual enjoyment, the enjoyment of reading the news a blind intellectual enjoyment.

Can we clarify this distinction further so to get a better grip on it? Brentano characterized an evident judgement as judgement that ‘declares itself to be correct’.¹⁵ When we make such a self-evident judgement we are aware of our judging as well as of its correctness. An evident judging is a judging whose correctness cannot escape you when you are aware of making it: the judgement is not only correct; it is characterized as correct.¹⁶ In the case of my judgement that everything is self-identical the judgement strikes me as correct, although I cannot give independent reasons for its truth (ibid.). Similarly, if you are aware of your enjoyment of listening to the Beethoven symphony (or, strictly speaking, to a temporal part of it as it unfolds over time) you have a sense that your enjoyment is appropriate to its object. If you are aware of your enjoyment, you are also aware of the correctness of your enjoyment. It strikes you as correct to enjoy your hearing: *enjoying is what one ought to do with respect to this perceptual activity*.

¹⁴ See FCA, 118 [186].

¹⁵ See LRU, 141.

¹⁶ OKRW, 19-20 [18–19].

In contrast to my judgement that everything is self-identical my perception of a red square is blind *because it is not characterised as correct*. When it seems to me that there is red square in front of me, I am so constituted that I will acknowledge a red square if I am not aware of evidence that my senses deceive me. My belief-forming mechanisms make me acknowledge a red square in front of me, ‘although there is nothing which characterises the acknowledging judgement as correct’ (OKRW, 20 [19]; my translation). Similarly, a blind love is the manifestation of an acquired disposition or instinct. It is human nature to like some things; it is part of our personality to have acquired dispositions to like some activities and not others. For instance, I am disposed to enjoy tasting hot mustard sandwiches. I love tasting them neither for the reason that it is correct to love it nor for the reason that I should do so because it furthers my interests. I do so out of a natural inclination.

With this in mind, let us answer the questions posed in the introduction: What do sensory and intellectual pleasures have in common, what distinguishes them? Both sensory and intellectual pleasures are likings of activities: sensory pleasure is liking a perceptual activity; intellectual pleasures liking an intellectual activity such as proving or contemplating. The distinction between intellectual pleasures and sensory pleasure seems ‘shallow. The only distinction between sensory pleasure and intellectual pleasure concerns the kinds of activity they are directed on. This observation raises an exegetical problem. Aristotle held that sensory and intellectual pleasures are themselves different in kind. So far we have no reason to follow Aristotle in this point. Yes, enjoying proving theorems and enjoying listening to flute music have different objects. But they are the same kind of mental act. Why and how should a difference in the object enjoyed make the first enjoyment different in kind from the second? In the next section I will reconstruct Brentano’s answer to this question.

5. The Distinction between Sensory and Intellectual Pleasure

I take my clue from one of the few criticisms that Brentano made of Aristotle:

Already [*schon*] Aristotle surmised [*kommt auf die Vermutung*] in the final book of the *Nicomachian Ethics* that the feeling of pleasure accompanying our intellectual activities [*geistigen Akte*] belong to them naturally, but are not given in them [*aber nicht in ihnen selbst gegeben sein*]. But he never

sufficiently investigated the problem of intensities, and did not go into further detail. (LH, 155 [162]; I have changed the translation.)

The claim Brentano ascribes to Aristotle is difficult to pin down precisely in book X of *Nichomachian Ethics*. I propose therefore to ignore the reference to Aristotle and focus on the distinction Brentano wants to draw. Both intellectual and sensory pleasure accompany their activities and belong naturally to them, but only the sensory pleasures are given in the sensory activities. What does that mean? Brentano points us to the notion of intensity as the clue to understand this point.

Let's start with the clue: *intensity*. Every sensory enjoyment has a degree of intensity; we intuitively conceive of enjoyments as stronger or weaker, as having more or less force. I enjoy tasting hot mustard sandwiches to a higher degree than sandwiches without hot mustard. Brentano made an important assumption about such degrees of intensity. A mental activity can only have a degree of intensity if it has spatial parts or it is directed on an object that has spatial parts.¹⁷ Consider, for example, seeing a colour. The intensity of my seeing depends, Brentano argues, on how dense the space I perceive is filled with coloured parts. The more parts of the space are filled with a particular colour, say redness, the higher the intensity of my seeing of redness.

Why does temporal extension either of object or act not suffice for the possession of intensity? As far as I know Brentano did not answer this question. But he could have given the following answer: An enjoyment at a time has a degree of intensity at that time. Neither the enjoyment nor its object needed to be temporally extended to have this degree of intensity. Hence, possession of an intensity does not depend on temporal extension.

Brentano's conception of intensity gives rise to a number of questions. Is the mereological account of intensity independently plausible?¹⁸ If not, are there other reasons to say that intellectual pleasure has no intensity? I will not address these

¹⁷ See LH, 155 [161–2], US, 134–5.

¹⁸ Stumpf 1917, 35 takes Brentano to replace intensity with a different measure. Stumpf 1917 § 6 gives a good overview of the debate about intensity of visual sensations at the end of the 19th century.

questions here. My aim is to see whether Brentano can draw a distinction between sensory and intellectual pleasure by appealing to the notion of intensity.

On Brentano's conception of intensity some mental acts can have no intensity. Mental acts themselves at least seem not to be extended in space, mental acts have no spatial parts. So a mental act can only have an intensity if it is directed on an extended object. Any mental act whose object is not extended cannot have an intensity. Since intellectual enjoyment is not directed on something that has spatial parts.¹⁹ For example, when I enjoy contemplating the form of the Good, neither the object I take pleasure in, my contemplation, nor my enjoyment has spatial parts. Hence, by Brentano's lights, this intellectual pleasure can have no intensity. In contrast, one of the objects of a sensory pleasure is always spatially extended: a colour trope etc. All sensory pleasures have therefore a degree of intensity.

This way of drawing the distinction between sensory and intellectual pleasure implements Aristotle's idea that pleasure differ in kind because they have objects of different kinds. The pleasures in sensory activities are pleasures in activities that have intensities and therefore the pleasures have intensities; intellectual pleasures can't. I don't know whether this distinction justifies one to think of sensory and intellectual pleasure as different in kind. For we are not given enough information about what a difference in kind amounts to. But it is a distinction that has theoretical consequences as we will see in the next section.

6. How can an Intellectual Enjoyment have a Degree of Intensity?

A pressing problem for Brentano's attempt to distinguish between sensory and intellectual pleasure are *prima facie* examples of *intense* intellectual enjoyment. Brentano's example is Newton's joy:²⁰

When Newton read the results of the new astronomical measurements that confirmed his hypothesis, joy overwhelmed him more and more in such a way that he was not able to continue reading. (LH, 155 [162])

¹⁹ Is enjoyment of geometry an intellectual pleasure? If it is, there seems to be a form of intellectual pleasure that can have intensity.

²⁰ The Newton example is frequently referred to in the literature on pleasure. See Feldman 1988, 67-8 and Lemos 1994, 71

Brentano does not give us many details about Newton's intellectual rapture. Fortunately for us pleasure at discovery is common in great scientists. The following description of Einstein's pleasure when he discovered the theory of relativity has more detail:

Einstein felt all the pure wonder of that perfect match between theory and reality. Working at this desk, some time before he rose before the Academy, the correct answer appeared as he cranked through the final steps. It was when, he told a friend, *his heart actually shuddered in his chest – genuine palpitations. He wrote it was as if something had snapped in him, and told another friend that he was “besides himself with joy.”* (Levenson 2015, 172-3; my emphasis.)

Einstein took intellectual pleasure in recognising the truth of his hypotheses. *Prima facie*, his intellectual pleasure had a high degree of intensity; 'he is besides himself with joy'.

Such intensive intellectual pleasures pose a challenge for the combination of Brentano's view of intellectual pleasure with his view about the nature of intensity. In order to meet the challenge we need, Brentano says, take into account that we 'say in two ways that someone enjoys something':

One can say in two ways that someone enjoys, or takes pleasure, unpleasure, or displeasure in something. One says it in one way if something is the *object* of this direction of the emotion [*Gemütsrichtung*]. But one says it also if one takes pleasure or unpleasure in another object but the pleasure or unpleasure in it is stirred while simultaneously the other is enjoyed or one takes unpleasure in it because one takes pleasure [or] displeasure in the former. *Only in this way can one say that that one takes intensive pleasure or displeasure in the intellectual [an Geistigem]; for all that is intensive requires continuity and spatial extension, either in itself or in its objects.* When Newton read the results of the new astronomical measurements that confirmed his hypothesis, joy overwhelmed him more and more in such a way that he was not able to continue reading. He was subject to most vehement sensory affects of pleasure that were linked to intellectual pleasure as redundancies. Similarly,

Archimedes felt as though he was inebriated when calling out his *eureka* and a pleasure that is tied to the awareness of virtue and vice is often accompanied by powerful sensory affects. (LH, 155 [161–2]; my translation and emphasis)

I have re-translated parts of this passage. I will make clear why in the next section.

Brentano claims we say in two ways that someone enjoys something. What are these two ways? Consider an independent example taken from the literature on polysemy.²¹ In

The window was boarded up

we use ‘the window’ to refer to the glass in the window opening. In

The window was broken

we use the same word to refer to window opening. We might easily find other examples in which ‘the window’ with its linguistic meaning unchanged is used to refer to things related to window openings and/or fillings of the openings.

According to Brentano, we find something similar with complements of ‘enjoy’. When we report someone’s enjoyment the same words used to specify the object of the enjoyment can refer to different things without change in meaning. Let’s illustrate it with a related example.²² Consider my report:

I enjoyed drinking absinthe last night.

This report may be true although I mainly enjoyed the effects of my drinking the absinthe – the fuzzy glow of warmth caused by imbibing absinthe, the jolly mood – and only to some extent my actual drinking it, e.g. my putting it in my mouth, tasting it etc. However, the report would not be true if I did not also enjoy the actual drinking. Just as in the window examples, we have here a case of transfer or broadening of reference of ‘drinking absinth’ from the original referent – drinking

²¹ I take the example from Nunberg 1979, 148.

²² I am grateful to Jessica Leech for improving the example.

absinthe – to a prominent effect of it – the sensation and mood – which may last longer than the drinking. To make this plausible consider:

I enjoyed drinking absinthe last night. It was a great experience.

The actual drinking was not a great experience, yet some of its effects may deserve to be called so.

Brentano holds that the mechanism just outlined is also at work when we say that Newton's and Einstein's intellectual pleasure was intense. Newton's and Einstein's intellectual enjoyment caused them to take sensory pleasure in a sensory activity. Einstein, for example, took intensive sensory pleasure in perceiving states of his body and this sensory enjoyment is caused by and overlaps in time with his intellectual enjoyment. Hence, one can truly say

Einstein took *intense* pleasure in discovering Relativity.

The enjoyment we talk about is or includes the sensory enjoyment caused by the intellectual enjoyment. Since the caused sensory enjoyment was intense we can truly say that the pleasure was intense, without contradicting the view that intellectual pleasure lack intensity. We can compare this to saying:

I *greatly* enjoyed drinking absinth last night.

The enjoyment may be great not because I greatly enjoyed the actual drinking, but because I enjoyed the drinking to some degree and I greatly enjoyed its effects on me: the sensations caused were immensely enjoyable. In the same way talk of intensive intellectual pleasure is talk about the intensity of the sensory pleasure caused by the intellectual pleasure or of the intensity of their combination.²³

The view that many of our words are referentially flexible is independently plausible. Hence, Brentano's claim that the words we use to specify the object of our enjoyment are referentially flexible is promising. However, he will need to show that whenever we find it plausible to say that there was an intense pleasure in an

²³ On this form of transfer see PES 65 [I, 119].

intellectual activity, the words we use to specify the object of the pleasure refer to effects of the activity or the activity. In this paper I will not assess whether Brentano can capture all examples of intense intellectual pleasure. For I am mainly interested in how Chisholm (mis)read the last quotation and turned it into an influential reductive account of intellectual pleasure. In the next section I will therefore turn to the so-called ‘Brentano-Chisholm’ view.

7. The ‘Brentano-Chisholm View’ of Intellectual Pleasure

Brentano used the example of Newton’s intellectual pleasure as a counter-example of the combination of his view of intellectual pleasure with a particular take on intensity. The example is used to illustrate his response to this problem, but not to motivate a thesis about the nature of intellectual pleasure. In contrast, Chisholm (1986, 30) interprets the example as suggesting a reductive account of intellectual pleasure. To see why consider Chisholm and Schneewind’s translation of a part of the passage discussed in the previous section:

When Newton read that his astronomical hypotheses had been confirmed by new measurements, his joy became more and more intense and he was finally so overcome that he could no longer continue reading. *He succumbed to the intensive sensuous pleasure which had redounded from his higher feelings.*

Chisholm takes this to suggest that a higher feeling becomes an intellectual pleasure when intensive sensuous pleasure ‘redounds’ from it (More about this in due course). However, the German text does not suggest this reading. The German is:

Er [Newton] unterlag offenbar den heftigsten sinnlichen Affekten der Lust, welche als Redundanzen an ein geistiges Gefallen sich knüpfte.

Brentano does not talk of a ‘*higher feelings*’, only about intellectual pleasure [*geistiges Gefallen*]. Newton experiences intellectual pleasure. There is already intellectual pleasure and it does not need the sensory pleasure or anything else to be turned into one. The sensory pleasures do not ‘redound’ from the intellectual one. There is no ‘redounding’, the sensory pleasure is a ‘Redundanz’ it is an add-on; it is

redundant. Brentano wants to explain away the Newton example as a problem for his theory of intensity; he does not take it to suggest an account of intellectual pleasure.

Be that as it may, let us have a look at what Chisholm makes of Brentano's remarks on the intensity of intellectual pleasure. According to Chisholm, intellectual pleasure – in Chisholm's terminology 'nonsensory pleasure' – is a propositional attitude:

Nonsensory pleasure and pain are instances of what are sometimes called propositional attitudes. (Chisholm 1986, 27)

We say that we are pleased that something is the case:

John was pleased that Mary came to the party.

John was pleased that the delivery arrived on time.

But are the propositional attitudes reported here what Brentano called 'intellectual enjoyments'? As an exegesis or reconstruction this is implausible. I agree with Olson (2003, 139) that speaking of propositional attitudes in this connection 'would be alien to Brentano'. For example, it is false to say that Brentano held 'that a person's love of some state of affairs may cause him to experience sensory pleasure' (Feldman 1988, 68). For Brentano, love is not a propositional attitude; one does not love that *p*. It is a non-propositional attitude: one loves objects, in particular one's own activities.

Now, Chisholm takes the Newton example to suggest that a nonsensory or intellectual pleasure is a propositional attitude that causes sensory pleasures:

What Brentano calls the nonsensory pleasure is not the sensory pleasure itself, nor is it the love or approval one then has for the combined experience – that of contemplating the intentional object of the belief and having the resultant sensory pleasure. The nonsensory pleasure consists in the *love* or *approval* one then has for the intentional object of belief and having the resultant sensory pleasure. (Chisholm 1986, 30)

One loves that p and this causes one to experience sensory pleasure, where, roughly speaking, one experiences sensory pleasure when one loves a sensing.²⁴ Lemos's comment brings out the point of this idea:

What makes nonsensory pleasures *pleasures* is the sensory pleasure that redounds on certain other psychological states ... (Lemos 1994, 71)

A propositional attitude is not in itself a pleasure; only sensory pleasures are real pleasure. Hence, only if the propositional attitude causes a sensory pleasure it becomes an intellectual pleasure.

Let us start by noting that Chisholm misconstrues Brentano. According to Brentano, intellectual pleasure is a love of an intellectual activity like contemplating the forms and not another thing. I can enjoy contemplating the forms whether or not my enjoyment causes sensory pleasure. Brentano argued, expressed in current terminology, that we can only ascribe intensity to an intellectual pleasure if we take its object to be a process that includes effects of the intellectual activity, namely perceptions we take pleasure in. However, *an intellectual pleasure is a pleasure independently of whether or not it causes a sensory pleasure*. Only qualifying it as intense depends on the causation of a sensory pleasure.

Feldman (1988, 68) summed Chisholm's (mis)interpretation up as follows:

S takes propositional pleasure in p at $t =$

S 's love of (the state of affairs that) p at t causes S to experience sensory pleasure at t .

This definition is sometimes called the 'Brentano–Chisholm view [of nonsensory pleasure]'. If the Brentano–Chisholm view is right, sensory pleasure is metaphysically fundamental: only a propositional attitude that causes such a pleasure is an intellectual pleasure.

²⁴ See Chisholm 1986, 26. I take Chisholm to be wrong about the primary object of sensory pleasure, but cannot argue this point in detail here. See my 2017, chapter 10.2.

It should by now be clear that the ‘Brentano–Chisholm’ view is not Brentano’s view. But even though it is not Brentano’s view, it may be a promising view of intellectual pleasure? However, there are two immediate problems for the ‘Brentano–Chisholm’ view.

First, it is unclear how the causation of a sensory pleasure should transform something which is not a pleasure into one. Compare: my kicking the wall may cause an injury. But it does not make the cause, the kicking, an injury.

Second, one can, it seems, be pleased that *p* and this propositional attitude can be a genuine pleasure, although it does not cause a sensory pleasure. Feldman (1988, 67) consider the example of motorcyclist who has been anaesthetized after an accident. He neither feels sensory pain nor sensory pleasure.

He may nevertheless be pleased to find that he is still alive. (ibid)

The fact that his pleasure that he is alive does not cause a sensory pleasure seems simply irrelevant.

8. Feldman on Sensory and Attitudinal Pleasure

While Chisholm’s Brentano takes sensory pleasure to be conceptually fundamental and needed in the explanation of nonsensory pleasure, Feldman turns the direction of explanation around: nonsensory pleasure is needed in the explanation of sensory pleasure. In this section I will discuss the direction of explanation that takes nonsensory pleasure to be conceptually basic. To anticipate: neither direction of explanation seems promising. Sensory and intellectual pleasures are both pleasures, but neither is conceptually prior to the other.

In order to assess Feldman’s proposal, let’s first get clear about the notion of sensory pleasure he uses. According to him, sensations are pleasant or pleasure giving.²⁵ Sensations are feelings: Feldman gives as an example the ‘all-over bodily feeling of warmth’. These feelings are sensory pleasures:

A person experiences sensory pleasure at a time if he feels pleasurable sensations then. If you like the tastes of champagne, you might experience

²⁵ Feldman 1988, 60.

sensory pleasure as you sip a cool glass of your favorite and nibble on caviar. [...] The point here, however, is that sensory pleasures are '*feelings*' – things relevantly like feelings of heat and cold; feelings of pressure, tickles, and itches, the feeling you get in your back when getting a massage. (Feldman 2004, 55-6)

In Feldman's classification of pleasure, 'intellectual pleasure' or 'pleasure of the mind' is not mentioned. He talks about propositional (Feldman 1988) or attitudinal pleasure (Feldman 2004). However, these pleasures seem to be the closest successors to Brentano's intellectual pleasure. Feldman argues that propositional pleasure is conceptually fundamental in understanding pleasure:

[W]hat makes a feeling be a sensory pleasure, in my view, is the fact that the person who feels it takes intrinsic attitudinal pleasure in the fact that he himself is then feeling it. (Feldman 2004, 57)

What recommends this definition of sensory pleasure?

If we define sensory pleasure as Feldman proposes to do, we can solve the 'heterogeneity puzzle' (Feldman 2004, 79). What is this puzzle? Compare the pleasure you take in smoking a good cigar with the pleasure you take in being massaged. Is there a particular feeling that is common to both and in which your taking pleasure consists? Feldman reports:

After many years of careful research on this question, I have come to the conclusion that they have nothing in common phenomenologically. Yet they are both pleasures. Why? (Feldman 2004, 79)

Because we take the same propositional attitude to their occurrence. What makes all of these heterogeneous feelings sensory pleasures is that one is (intrinsically) pleased *that one feels them*.²⁶ If Feldman's solution is right – sensory pleasures are 'feelings in which the feeler takes intrinsic attitudinal pleasure' (ibid) – there can be no sensory

²⁶ See Feldman 2004, 57.

pleasure without the subject of the pleasure being pleased that she herself is feeling the pleasure.²⁷

What about people who are utterly absorbed in an activity that provides them with sensory pleasure? Feldman argues that although they are not aware that they enjoy (are glad) *that they themselves have certain feelings*, they still take attitudinal pleasure in this fact. Why? Because if someone were to ask them, they would immediately recognize that they are taking pleasure in their feelings.²⁸

In the right circumstances a person who takes sensory pleasure will, if suitably prompted and reflective, also be pleased that she herself has the pleasureable feelings. But this does not show that one cannot take sensory pleasure in something *without being pleased that one feels this feeling*. If you ask me whether my students are aliens, I will, *ceteris paribus*, immediately answer NO. But this does not show, as Audi argues, that I already believed that they are not aliens.²⁹ It shows that I had standing disposition to acquire such a belief when suitably prompted, but a disposition to acquire a belief is not itself a belief. Feldman's defense of the view that person immersed in an activity takes attitudinal pleasure fails for the same reason. The person who is immersed in her activity and takes sensory pleasure is disposed, when questioned, to immediately form an attitudinal pleasure. All she needs to do is to reflect on how things are for her and respond to the question posed. But a disposition to form an attitudinal pleasure when prompted is not itself an attitudinal pleasure. Hence, there are plausible cases of sensory pleasure without (intrinsic) attitudinal pleasure. If there are such cases, Feldman's theory of sensory pleasure is implausible. Sensory and nonsensory pleasure are different kinds of pleasure; neither is conceptually prior to the other.³⁰

9. Divide and Conquer

A common feature of both Chisholm's and Feldman's theories of pleasure is that nonsensory pleasure is identified with the propositional attitude of being pleased or

²⁷ See *ibid.*

²⁸ See *ibid.*, 58.

²⁹ See Audi 1982, 116f.

³⁰ Consequently we need a different response to the heterogeneity puzzle. See Crisp 2006, 628f for an alternative answer.

being glad that p . According to these philosophers, we take pleasure in states of affairs or facts. If it is a fact that p , and you are glad that p , you take attitudinal pleasure in the fact that p .³¹ In contrast, Brentano argued that intellectual enjoyment is not enjoyment of a fact. It is an enjoyment of an activity.

Now, one might propose that enjoyment of an activity is just the enjoyment of particular facts concerning the activity. In more general form:

For any intellectual activity ϕ : S enjoys ϕ -ing if, and only if, there is a fact p , such that S is pleased that p

Take enjoying proving a theorem. According to reductive proposal, my intellectual pleasure in proving it consists in being pleased that p , for some fact p . But which fact? There seems to be no non-arbitrary answer to this question. The most plausible candidate is that I am glad about the fact that I undergo or perform the activity. For instance, I am enjoying proving a theorem if, and only if, I am pleased about the fact *that I am proving a theorem*. The problem here is that when I unreflectively enjoy proving a theorem, all I think about are the steps in the proof, etc. The same considerations that counted against Feldman's view of sensory pleasure apply in this case: we have no reason to say that enjoying an activity requires enjoying a fact concerning the activity. In sum: enjoying an activity is not enjoying the fact that one undergoes or performs it.

In turn, being pleased that p or being glad that p are propositional attitudes that cannot be reduced to forms of enjoyment of activities. Consider an example of propositional pleasure:

I am pleased that Iceland did well in the European Championships.

My propositional pleasure is a dispositional state with a temporal extension. If one holds that there is only non-propositional enjoyment, one needs to explain the propositional pleasure away. One needs to find for every case of propositional pleasure a corresponding intellectual activity that is the 'proper' object of enjoyment:

³¹ See Feldman 2004, 56.

S is pleased that p if, and only if, S enjoys ϕ -ing that p .

Prima facie, plausible fillers for ' ϕ -ing' are activities that result in belief or knowledge that p such as *learning*, *finding out* or *discovering*. However, such an attempt to 'explain away' propositional pleasure fails for two reasons.

First, Taylor (1963, 8) points out that enjoying an activity and propositional pleasure differ with respect to their temporal properties. I was truly pleased that Iceland did well in the European Championships for the last week or so, but I can only enjoy learning/finding out that Iceland did well in the European Championship at and for the time when I found out, say Monday morning at 11. My punctiform enjoyment of finding out that Iceland did well in the European Championships is long gone, while my propositional pleasure lasts. One can attempt to modify the original idea to take this point into account:

S is pleased that p if, and only if, there was or is a time t at which S enjoyed ϕ -ing that p .

The modification sets the bar for propositional pleasure too low: I was once pleased to find out that p . But time has moved on and I am no longer pleased that p . Past enjoyment of finding out does not guarantee present enjoyment of fact.

Second, I may enjoy finding out facts, but when I have found them out not take propositional pleasure in the facts I found out. Imagine you are a physicist who worked for a long time on hard problem. You may truly report after your discovery of the solution:

I enjoyed discovering that $E = MC^2$, but I am not pleased that $E = MC^2$.

The pleasure is one of discovering the fact, I don't love or am pleased that $E = MC^2$.

Taking pleasure in an activity is one thing, taking pleasure in a fact another. Brentano describes the first kind of pleasure, Chisholm and Feldman the second kind. Hence, they are not in conflict.

10. Conclusion

Sensory and intellectual pleasures are for Brentano two non-propositional attitudes that are directed on activities of different kinds. The basic difference is the difference between perceptual and intellectual activities and this difference grounds a difference in the intensity of the enjoyment in these activities.

Both Chisholm and Feldman ignore that enjoyment is for Brentano non-propositional. They replace Brentano's distinction between likings of different kinds of activities (sensory and intellectual) with a distinction between feelings (Feldman) and sensory pleasures (Chisholm) on the one hand and the propositional attitude of being pleased that *p* on the other hand. For them, sensory and non-sensory pleasures are not phenomena of the same fundamental kind.³² It is hard to see why one should think of being pleased that *p* and a pleasurable feeling as different species of a common kind. Both Chisholm and Feldman respond to this problem by inter-defining the different 'pleasures'. Chisholm defines propositional pleasure in terms of sensory pleasure (the *so-called* 'Brentano–Chisholm view'); Feldman sensory pleasure in term of propositional pleasure. Neither definition is motivated; both are refuted by counter-examples.

Brentano's view of pleasure is neither superior not inferior to the so-called 'Brentano–Chisholm view'. Brentano simply deals with a different phenomenon: the enjoyment of intellectual and perceptual activities. A satisfactory theory of pleasure must have room for such enjoyment and since it is not a propositional attitude, for non-propositional attitudes as well. Philosophers have ignored non-propositional intellectual pleasure for a long time. Brentano gives us good reasons to pay attention to them.³³ The lesson we can take from Brentano is that there are pleasures in activities that cannot be reduced to propositional and sensory pleasures and that these pleasures need separate treatment. Brentano provided us with some of the conceptual resources to start theorising about such pleasures.

³² Massin 2014, 316 discusses this point in more detail.

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